

PROMOTING DIVERSITY

“Serving with Pride” leads the way for police in Ontario

POLICE LINE - DO CROSS

by Jean Turner

Serving With Pride (SWP) is a not-for-profit LGBTQ network that aims to build bridges with the public, promote positive relationships between LGBTQ members and their respective police organizations and break down systemic barriers and stereotyping.

“The fact is, while many police agencies have made many positive steps towards equality, including developing their own internal LGBTQ peer support networks, there are still police officers or employees who don’t feel comfortable being “out” at work,” says SWP President, Hamilton Police Service Cst. Brian Mitchell.

SWP provides a confidential, safe network of peers who understand the systemic barriers and stereotyping unique to the police environment, without being tied to any one police service.

SWP Director Cst. Danielle Bottineau has an extensive background in diversity issues working as the LGBTQ liaison officer for Toronto Police Service.

“While the perception might be that because this is 2016 there is not a problem, overwhelmingly I hear stories and meet police officers who spend their careers hiding their sexuality or gender identity from their co-workers. It is a terrible burden to keep a secret like that and one that will often lead to mental health concerns.”

The network has a long history of not only assisting members but also improving the overall relationship between police and the LGBTQ public they serve.

Recently, a newly formed SWP executive has committed to continue in that legacy and are moving forward with vigorous promotion, targeting Ontario police and criminal justice agencies.

Currently the executive team is made up of members from Hamilton Police Service, Durham Regional Police Service, York Regional Police Service, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Toronto Police Service, Ontario Provincial Police and a municipal bylaw enforcement



The newly formed Serving with Pride executive has a mandate to serve LGBTQ police and criminal justice professionals in Ontario. Shown at their inaugural formation meeting last fall are L/R Front: Heath Miller, Rev. John Mastandrea, Danielle Bottineau, Dena Peden, Paula Prosvach. L/R

officer. They bring diverse experience, sharing best practices and lessons learned from their respective agencies.

For those officers and employees that are already “out” and comfortable at work, the network offers an extensive network of peers along with opportunities for participation at social and learning events. This allows them to not only advance in their own personal and professional development but the opportunity to be a catalyst for continuing change.

“The most significant catalyst for change in someone is for them know that they are NOT alone and that there are others who are in their corner encouraging and supporting their personal growth,” comments SWP Treasurer, York Regional Police officer Cst Heath Miller. “I am so proud to be able to offer that support through Serving with Pride.”

SWP encourages active membership from a range of law enforcement and criminal justice professionals including police, border services, transit and rail enforcement officers, corrections and more, especially from agencies outside of the Greater Toronto Area that historically have not been well represented.

“We have taken the step of adding a “student membership” category as well.” says SWP Director Eastern Region, Durham

Regional Police D/Cst. Dena Peden.

“Law enforcement and criminal justice students bring a valuable perspective that is beneficial to achieving the goals of SWP. Their input and participation is encouraged not only because they have a lot to offer but also because once they graduate and start working in their chosen career, they will bring to their workplace an awareness that others can learn from.”

SWP thanks the OACP Diversity Committee for its support and providing a *Best Practices in Policing and LGBTQ Communities in Ontario* resource document. This is the first of its kind published in Canada, and SWP believes that it will serve as a model for other jurisdictions here and abroad.

The guide can be viewed and downloaded at www.oacp.ca

SWP has three categories of members. Active membership is \$35/year, associate is \$40/year and student is \$25/year. Visit the web page at www.servingwithpride.ca for definitions of each category.

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